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Reading Swift's Poetry, 1967-2017

Abstract

This essay surveys major scholarship on Jonathan Swift's poetry published after 1967, the 300th anniversary of his birth up to the 350th, in 2017. What is the current status of Swift as a poet, as distinct from Swift the prose satirist or even Swift the Hibernian Patriot? Is he best placed in separate Irish or English traditions or in both? Was he a mere man of rhymes or an ambitious poet? How have scholars approached his verse? Which works have received the most attention? Which deserve more?

Keywords

Jonathan Swift; poetry; eighteenth century; reading; satire

By 1967, the tercentenary of his birth, Swift had in some quarters been dubbed an “anti-poet” – an unseemly voice lost amid an early eighteenth-century choir of verse technicians. To be sure, his poetic canon is full of riotously funny lampoons, mock-panegyrics, political and religious libels, self-mocking satire, sordid love poems, and more besides. His lines often look crude: the wrenched couplets test the patience of readers accustomed to Augustan correctness. Equally, his trimeters trip along at an exhilarating pace. (Swift the poet ‘beats us all hollow’, said Byron, one of our greatest ever craftsmen; ‘his rhymes are wonderful’.) The diction is often greasy. But Swift also soars at will to lofty heights of ironic heroism. Over the past fifty years, Swift the poet has been more firmly put back into dialogue with his peers, typically Pope and Gay, or Patrick Delany, Thomas Sheridan and others in Dublin, or even younger rivals like Smedley and Arbuckle. He has been repositioned in strikingly different groupings such as the colloquial school of Skelton, Cotton and Butler, the panegyric tradition of Dryden, Cowley and Marvell, or the Anglo-Irish burlesquers of Ovid, Horace and Virgil. Few poets are as resourceful as Swift, as we now more readily acknowledge. What explains this substantial change in the poet's reputation? The short answer is the large and diverse range of bibliographical, formalist,

historicist and cultural approaches that have added much to our enjoyment of the Dean's unique and challenging output.

In this survey I will trace an overview of scholarship published between 1967 and 2017. Different exegetical interests will come and go, but Swift's poetry will continue to benefit from close, sustained scrutiny, whether in the assimilative manner adopted by the major commentators of the 1970s, the radical coherence favoured in the 1980s, or the revisionism of the 1990s. Rather than extensive discussions of individual treatments, I am interested here in the broader trends seen in the modern study of Swift's poetry in English. An annotated bibliography, **Vieth 1982** describes scholarship on Swift's poetry published between 1900 and 1980. **Marshall (2010)** usefully stakes out the terrain of Swift studies more broadly – her reminder about the importance of grounding critical interpretations within accurate textual considerations is particularly salient. Marshall also raises pertinent questions that we might confront in a narrower study of Swift's poetry: is a topical approach to the material more useful than a literary one? Is such a distinction still meaningful, or perhaps misleading, in the case of a poet such as Swift? Is it better to treat Swift's verse separately from, or in conjunction with, his prose works?

Many fine studies of Swift's poetry have appeared in languages other than English – most persistently in German, Polish, Japanese and Korean. For convenience even major foreign-language studies such as Löffler (1982) will not be discussed here. Real (2005), incidentally, usefully surveys Swift scholarship in Europe. Many fine biographical studies of Swift produced since the 1960s also lie beyond my scope. The definitive account has long been Ehrenpreis (1962-83). Three recent biographies offer insightful or otherwise productively contentious readings of a generous array of poems within biographical contexts (**Damrosch 2013**, **Stubbs 2016**, **Hammond 2016**). Although nominally focused on Swift's politics, other biographers offer informative comments on the poems. **Lock (1983)** presents Swift as a Tory; **Downie (1984)** calls him an Old Whig, and **Higgins (1994)** outs him as a Jacobite. The authoritative collection of the poems remains Harold Williams's edition (1937, rev. 1958), but Pat Rogers's modernised edition (1983) includes essential new endnotes and profitably addresses ongoing bibliographical issues. At the end of the 2010s, a major new critical collection of the poems will appear in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jonathan Swift (2008-), edited by James Woolley and Stephen Karian.

Order and Confusion: The Tercentenary and Beyond

A decent introductory guide to Swift's work at the tercentenary is **Hunting 1967**. Its chapter 'The Left-handed Poet' attends to the staples of Swift's poetic canon: *A Description of a City Shower*, the poems to Stella, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, *The Day of Judgement*, *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift*, some of the Market Hill poems, the "unprintable" poems, and poems designated simply as fun. W. A. Speck's *Swift* outsourced a chapter on poetry to Philip Roberts (1969). Rehearsing the old-fashioned view of the poet as a mere man of rhymes, Roberts nevertheless provides a wide-ranging account of Swift's career in verse from the 1690s to the 1730s. The first significant monograph on Swift's poetry, Maurice Johnson's *The Sin of Wit* (1950), had been reprinted in 1966. Still useful today, Johnson delivered a clear-sighted overview of Swift's techniques with respect to a generous selection of the major poems, from the early odes to the famous late self-elegy and beyond. Mayhew's 1967 account of the manuscripts held at the Huntington Library, meanwhile, further fuelled the longstanding involvement of book historians in the study of Swift's poetry (**Mayhew 1967**). In particular, his detailed textual treatments of *Epistle to a Lady*, *On Poetry*, and *On His Own Deafness*, provided a model for the type of rigour demanded in explicating ~~the denseness of~~ such dense works.

A spate of essay collections appeared in the late 1960s. Swift's poetry features fairly prominently in the essays gathered by McHugh and Edwards (1967), not least of all in Austin Clarke's 'The Poetry of Swift'. In his important essay, 'Swift's Character', Herbert Davis traversed a number of the poems, including the still underrated Market Hill pieces and *The Life and Genuine Character of Jonathan Swift*. He has little time, though, for Swift's 'dreadful parodies of Cowley' – the early Pindaric odes written at Moor Park. These early poems have ~~also~~ failed to gain the sustained attention they merit. Clarke, meanwhile, treats Swift as an Irish poet, a theme that has received even greater consideration in recent years. **Vickers 1968** features two standout essays on poetry alone: Roger Savage's readable take on that lean, unflorid poem (as he terms it), *A Description of the Morning*; and Geoffrey Hill's treatment of Swift's 'poetry of reaction'. Impossible rhymes, supposedly uncontrolled outbursts, touchy invective: for Hill, the poems reveal a capacity to be at once resistant and reciprocal. Denis Donoghue's essay in *Swift Revisited* (1968), 'Swift as Poet', makes an apologetic case for the power of the verse. They 'helped to keep him sane', for one thing (p. 76). Like many scholars, Donoghue dismisses ~~the value of~~ the early, Cowleyan odes. Couplets, he says, better suited the flow of Swift's energy

Comment [NS1]: Referent would seem to demand 'It'

through single meanings. But, finally, Swift's reliance on a great poetic tradition would have been little comfort, Donoghue argues, if Swift knew that the tradition was on its way out, that the values by which he lived were doomed.

Jeffares edited two essay collections during the tercentenary. **Jeffares 1967** includes two essays particularly useful for the study of the poetry: Davis's 'Swift's View of Poetry' (originally published in 1931), and Rowse's 'Swift as Poet' (1945). Many of the other essays make valuable if fleeting reference to the poems. T. G. Wilson's 'Swift's Personality' (1962), like much scholarship inspired by **Ehrenpreis**, fixates on Swift's seeming pathologies (compulsive-obsessive behaviour here), but says useful things about *Cadenus and Vanessa*, one of the most critically acclaimed of Swift's poems, and the Stella verses. In 'The Jocose Dean' (published here for the first time), Dobree covers a number of texts, including the bantering verses for Lady Anne Acheson. Mercier and Jarrell place Swift within a folkloric Gaelic tradition. W. B. Yeats's insightful 1934 essay on window-pane writing alone might make this collection of especial interest to poetry scholars.

Rawson 1971 is a more pertinent collection for our purposes. Jefferson's 'The Poetry of Age' makes a compelling case for the prominence of aging as a shaping theme in Swift's oeuvre. He also pre-empts later interest in Swift's caustic mentorship of women such as Lady Acheson. Beckett extends the burgeoning interest in Swift's position in an Anglo-Irish tradition. Traugott considers the extent to which Swift ought to be likened to twentieth-century poets. **Donoghue 1971** includes Bateson's reading of *Morning* (1950), Hill's 'Jonathan Swift: The Poetry of "Reaction"' (1968), and Donoghue's own 'The Sin of Wit' (1969). Another 1970s collection, **Probyn 1978**, features little on the poetry, though Carnochan's 'The Consolations of Satire' uses *The Legion Club*, *Verses* and other works to posit the argument that satire is "therapeutic".

A number of vital journal articles appeared in the 1960s. **Davis 1964** features foundational work on Swift as a poet, especially on satire. Not until the late 1970s, though, would Swift's poetry attract sustained critical attention. According to **Trickett (1967)** the curious neglect of such a major poet, in relative terms, suggested critics were unwilling to accommodate Swift's style into their understanding of eighteenth-century verse. A decade later, three major monographs appeared in quick succession: **Jaffe 1977**, **Schakel 1978** and **Fischer 1978**. Picking up Trickett's concerns, Jaffe promptly dismisses the 'paraphernalia' of New Criticism. Swift, for Jaffe, is simply not as rewardingly allusive or as artful as Pope. Rather, his

Comment [NS2]: The first volume of the biography was the same year, 1962. Perhaps Ehrenpreis had published shorter things earlier that influenced Wilson, in which case, ignore this.

apparent artlessness conceals a profound perspective on everyday life. By attending to Swift's mastery of impersonation, his use of vivid and precise detail, and his manipulation of classical rhetoric for a modern audience, Jaffe argues, we will better understand Swift's unique approach to the art of poetry.

Schakel 1978 and **Fischer 1978** depart from, but ultimately complement, Jaffe's adept study. Not only is Swift's poetry highly allusive, for Schakel, it is blatantly so: 'the important thing in a study of Swift's poetry is not the *discovery* of allusions, but the consideration of their *use* in the poems' (p. 4). Tracing the development of a poetic style centred on allusion, Schakel offers extensive readings of the early odes, the first verse satires, personal poems after Virgil and Horace, poems about women, and political verse, including pieces on Ireland. Largely convincing, Schakel's account is particularly useful for understanding the effects of Swift's assimilation of the works of other poets, Horace say, into his own, seemingly occasional verse. Fischer's attends more readily to different poems. He is especially insightful when discussing *Cadenus and Vanessa* and *On Poetry*. The account of *Verses* – now considered to be the best poem, in place of *The Day of Judgment* – is pedestrian by comparison, but still a significant chapter on a remarkably robust work. **Woolley 1988** begins with an indispensable chapter on *Verses*, in which he addresses several bibliographical problems. A detailed chapter on *On Poetry* glosses numerous textual oddities and allusions.

1978 brought a special issue on Swift in *Papers on Language & Literature*. England outlines the emotional turbulence evident in *Cadenus and Vanessa*. Fischer discusses the Stella poems. Jaffe re-examines the Lady Acheson verses. Schakel traces the "remedy for love" motif in the scatological poems. Rodino meanwhile wonders whether the same poems are best characterised as blasphemy or blessing. Gilmore offers a Freudian reading of *Strephon and Chloe*. Sheehan brings Voiture into a consideration of Swiftian raillery. Tyne revisits Swift's description of himself as "only a man of rhimes" in a larger account of poetic form. Parnell, finally, explores the etiquette of the "sentimental repentance scene" in late-seventeenth-century poems.

Aside from dedicated studies ~~of Swift's poetry~~, throughout the 1970s Swift's poetry came under examination – often fleetingly – in monographs devoted to literature of the period at large. **Battestin (1974)** considers the theme of order and confusion. A study of literary representations of madness in the eighteenth century, **Byrd (1975)** takes the angry vision of *The Legion Club* as

Comment [N53]: Usually spelled Judgement. One other instance below, but if that's as it appears in Mayhew's title, leave alone.

a typical example of the Augustan response to mania. Useful as a broad account of Augustan satire, **Elkin (1973)** has little of significance to say about *Verses* – dismissed here as a conventional satirist’s apologia that reveals the author’s lack of faith in satire’s ability to reform. **Mell (1974)**, by contrast, positions *Verses* prominently in a study of the Augustan elegy as a transgressive mode. Nominally focused on Dryden’s panegyrics, **Garrison 1975** features an essential comparison between Swift’s *Ode to the King on His Irish Expedition* and **Cowley’s** *its* model, **Cowley’s** *Ode Upon His Majesties Restoration and Return*. Deceptively straightforward, so Garrison shows, the relationship between the poems is anything but merely imitative. **Miller et al. 1970**, another study of Augustanism, features two essays: Halsband on contemporaneous responses to *The Lady’s Dressing Room* and Rothstein on *Baucis and Philemon*. Both articles prefigure later critical developments – contextual readings of *Dressing Room* and classical allusion respectively. **Martz and Williams 1978** has two key studies: Wimsatt on rhetorical influences on Swift, and Vieth on *Verses*.

There has always been an interest in Swift’s classical inheritance. A neat example of this approach, **Nussbaum (1976)** places Swift in the Juvenalian tradition of satirical love poetry. Other studies that productively position Swift within larger traditions include **Lee 1971**, which considers two distinct streams of humour: the satirical and the non-satirical. Of particular interest are the analyses of *The Legion Club* and *Dressing Room*. A more important monograph on Swift, **Rawson 1973**, includes an extended discussion of *On Poetry* within a chapter on Swift, Yeats, Stevens, and other poets. **Rogers (1972)**, finally, re-examines Swift’s 1730s poetry as a response to Pope’s *Dunciad* – a text Swift claimed to have read dozens of times. *On Poetry*, says Rogers, is a climactic moment in the evolution of Grub Street mythology. Many of the better studies consider Swift within different contexts. But, on the whole, scholars in the 1970s further emphasised Swift’s oddities even as they tried to explain them away. Marshall dismisses most of the monographs on Swift’s poetry produced in these years as ‘disappointing, partly because their authors were trying to provide a cohesive overview of a non-cohesive canon’ (2010, p. 92). The point is well made: forming critical cohesiveness in the case of Swift needlessly underplays the manic energy of his verse. Less convincing is the claim that ‘the best way of dealing with the poetry is not to relegate it to a separate category’, that is, not to divorce it from Swift’s prose. Rawson has long demonstrated the importance of putting the poetry alongside the prose. Equally, though, he has shown the benefits to be gleaned when considering Swift among other poets as

Comment [NS4]: et al without period in all other instances.

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diverse as Voiture and Yeats. Rereading thoughtfully in any direction – whether we mean Swift as poet and prose writer or Swift the poet among other poets – cannot mean relegation.

Rereading Swift: The 1980s

Two notable monographs on Swift's poetry appeared at the start of the 1980s. Rather than explain away Swift's oddities, as the 1970s studies generally sought to do, they make a case for Swift's anti-Augustanism. **England (1980)** considers a limited group of stylistic tendencies in a restricted number of poems. Such restriction is deliberate – and, he says, builds on contemporaneous work on *Of Dreams* by Donoghue and *A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed* by Aden. The stylistic tendencies described by England are of two contrasting types: energy and order. England devotes extensive analysis to the undervalued Pindaric odes. Perversely, it seems, Swift's originality lies in adopting the exuberant manner of Cowley well into the post-Restoration period. By committing to the extremity of emotion riven through the mode ('My hate, whose lash just heaven has long decreed / Shall on a day make sin and folly bleed'), Swift enacts a transformation in his character and thereby confronts the conflict between himself and 'man's evil genius' in the present day. **Barnett (1981)** similarly argues for an underlying coherence – an effort to order – in Swift's poetic canon. For Barnett, Swift's writing is best understood as 'adversary poetry' that results from a shaping tension between a principle of unity and a principle of expansion. Reacting against the anti-poetry school, Barnett and England advocate a new appreciation of Swift's writing not predicated on established standards. Far from being a reactive poet, their Swift is a poet of quirky coherence.

One issue on which critics have long been divided, no more so than from the late 1970s through to the late 1980s, is Swift's attitude toward women, both real and fictive. **Gubar (1977)** critiqued male commentators for attempting to salvage Swift's reputation from charges of sexual neuroses. Against the excremental vision championed by Brown, or the Christian forthrightness outlined by Greene, Gubar takes Swift's apparent dread of the female body at face value. In reply, **Pollak (1978)** pointed out that feminist inquiry ought to consider, rather than dismiss, the rhetorical struggles confronted by either men or women engaged with the tyrannical limits of expression. Both critics agree that Pope was more comfortably identified with the bourgeois myth of passive womanhood. For Pollak, though, this reveals Swift's refusal to come to terms with modern conventions surrounding writing about the female sex. **Pollak (1985)** extends her

comparisons between Swift and Pope, giving detailed readings of *Cadenus and Vanessa*, *Cassinus and Peter*, and the excremental verse. Less focused on poetry, **Flynn (1990)** contrasts body imagery (especially that of the female body) in the works of Swift and Defoe. Two other notable studies of Swift's writing about female experience are **Nussbaum 1984** and **Doody 1988**. Nussbaum traces a blatant distinction between good and wicked women. The death of Stella in 1728, she claims, seems to have augured the change towards more deeply moralising writing about women. Doody, meanwhile, broadens our understanding of the real and fictive women in Swift's life.

The early 1980s brought two important essay collections on Swift's verse. In 1981 Fischer and Mell produced the first collection devoted exclusively to the poems. Fischer's Introduction reveals much about academic attitudes at the time: 'In the fall of 1975, several of us who had found Swift's poetry increasingly attractive began to wonder how many of our colleagues shared our experience' (p. 11). By this point, says Fischer, three dominant critical approaches to Swift's poetry had taken hold. He calls the first biobibliographical: because Swift cared little about the preservation of most of his poetry, critical energy has been needed in stabilising the texts properly. The second approach treats Swift as an "anti-poet" committed to making strange the everyday world. The third, rhetorical study, attempts to correct the other viewpoints. As appealing as the rhetorical approach is, Fischer concedes, it risks emptying the writing of soul. A compromise of the compromise might be in order. Addressing a deceptively straightforward question, Barnett's essay on 'Fictive Self-Portraiture in Swift's Poetry' offers a model approach here. What are we to make of the repetitively autobiographical character of much of Swift's canon? Barnett's response is neither thematic nor theoretical: the Swiftian self tends to be its own end rather than a strategy for presenting something else. Uphaus's 'Swift's Irony Reconsidered' revisits Leavis's assertion that Swift's greatness owes much to the negative intensity with which he wrote. Uphaus, though, insists on distinguishing between Swift the poet and Swift the prose writer. In the late poems particularly, he argues, the standard rhetorical complexities give away to outright attack. Swift the poet, we might infer, is less fictive than Swift the pseudonymous or allonymous prose writer. Although both respond to the rhetorical turn in Swift studies, Barnett and Uphaus speak at cross-purposes, which says something about the critical flexibility needed to understand Swift.

In the same collection, Scouten and Woolley stress the importance of context. Scouten draws a line between poems written for the public and for private persons: we must recognize that many of the most public sounding poems developed out of private concerns, he argues; otherwise we may read as dispassionate statements works that were heavily polished and revised versions of Swift's intimate view of the world around him. Woolley similarly cautions scholars against this tendency, using as evidence some of the most contested lines in Swift's entire poetic canon, the famous panegyric at the Rose at the end of *Verses*. Jaffe offers a detailed reading of Swift's bantering poems for Lady Acheson, the Dean's hostess at Market Hill in the late 1720s. Seemingly dashed off his pen to titillate a domestic audience, *Death and Daphne* is a particularly dense text that has long merited more attention. Vieth considers Swift's use of metaphor and Ovidian metamorphosis in his middle period, 1698 through 1719 (Rodino, in the same collection, favours a slightly shorter second phase: 1698-1714). Their disagreement extends to a debate about how typical the middle phase is: Vieth believes the poems of this period are characteristic of Swift; Rodino thinks they are anomalous. Taken together, the essays in this collection demonstrate the merits of reading Swift's poetry alongside different texts or within new contexts. Schakel finds much new to say about perhaps the most familiar grouping of Swift's verse – the scatological works – by setting them against Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*. Gilmore, incidentally, takes a psychological approach to the same poems. Fischer reads the Stella poems as types of Christian consolation. Sheehan interprets the Cowleyan odes as satiric pindarics. Mell puts Swift poems in the tradition of mimetic literature. Fricke draws on English colloquial satire. Collectively, these essays indicate that Swift was an attentive student of poetic history – perhaps the most salient lesson offered by Swift scholars in recent decades.

Vieth 1984 comprises “essential articles” for the study of Swift's poetry since 1960. The first section tackles the “anti-poetry” debate with contributions from Johnston, San Juan Jr, England, and Uphaus (Uphaus, in particular, protested vigorously against the label). The second, “Biographical Presence”, has just one contribution – an important one: Johnson's ‘Swift's Poetry Reconsidered’. The third, “Swift's Verse Style”, similarly has just Wimsatt's ‘Rhetoric and Poems: The Example of Swift’. Both are key representatives of their respective schools. The remaining seven sections attend to specific texts (the description poems, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, the Stella poems, *A Satirical Elegy*, the scatological poems, *On Poetry*, and *Verses*). *Morning* and *City Shower* have long been staples in Swift criticism. Indispensable criticism here comes

from O Hehir and Savage. Outside of the collection, other notable essays from the 1970s include **Johnson 1971**, **Carnochan 1972**, **Mayhew 1975**, **Peterson 1976**, **Fischer 1977** and **Gulick 1978**, all of which look at *The Day of Judgement*; **Fischer 1970**, **Mell 1973**, **Scouten and Hume 1973**, and **Woolley 1979**, on *Verses*; **Harris 1970**, on the early odes; **Cronin 1971**, on *A Panegyrick on the Dean*; **Tyne 1974**, on *On Poetry*; **Rosenheim 1976**, on *Ode to Sancroft*; **Fabricant 1975**, on the poetry of place; and **Rawson 1977**, on the city poems.

Fischer, Real and Woolley (1989) oversaw a substantial collection at the end of the 1980s, in which poetry features prominently. Although varied in their approaches, the contributors are particularly insightful on book-historical matters. Woolley examines in detail Stella's manuscript version of the poems. Real looks at *The Day of Judgement* in the bookish context of contemporaneous eschatology. Peake takes the "anti-poet" debate into a different direction: for him, Swift's conception of the poet's function was characteristically exalted, even saintly. In another revisionist piece, Ellis charts a sort of geobibliographical "progress of self-deception" in the textual history of *Phillis, or The Progress of Love*. Other essays published in the 1980s include **Conlon 1983**, a densely packed reading of *City Shower* that compellingly demonstrates its quirky, vital use of parody. Against this, **Manlove (1989)** considers the structure of the poem, thereby putting him more in line with earlier Swift criticism. Since the late 1970s, Real has delivered numerous essays explicating the unusual allusions in such poems as *A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed* and *Dressing Room*. Rogers has long been astute when covering lesser known works. Examples include a study of *Sid Hamet* (**1982**) and *The Bubble* (**1988**) – poems not covered in Vieth's needfully brief collection. Other poems now considered noteworthy have been the subject of Löffler's attention in recent decades, as in his 1988 study of *The Legion Club*. To give an indication of the widening breadth of focus, other articles printed in the 1980s include **Anderson 1980** on *Verses*; **England 1984** on *Morning*; **Fischer 1986** on *Epistle to a Lady*; **Keegan 1985** on Swift's fictive self-portraits; **Mell 1982** on *On Poetry*; **Robinson 1985** on the influence of Renaissance poetry; and **Zimmerman 1987** on the scatological verse.

The 1980s proved to be a significant decade in Swift studies not least because of the arrival of a dedicated annual journal, *Swift Studies* (1986-), and the first collection of the proceedings of the conference papers delivered at the international Münster Symposia on Swift (1985-). Since the beginning both series have shown substantial commitment to the poetry, and

remain the first place to which scholars should turn. Even a cursory account of their most invaluable essays lies beyond the scope of a survey of this kind (a list of contributors, to date, is given in the References section below). Looking at just two contributions to *Reading Swift* will prove illustrative. In the first proceedings (1985), Schakel assesses scholarship produced between 1974 and 1984. He rails against studies that neglect historical contexts, considers the appropriateness of New Criticism for the kinds of poems Swift wrote, and advocates the importance of placing the poetry alongside the prose. Schakel derides modern trends, not least of all the fascination with the rhetoric of vexation among critics. A proponent of the book-historical approach praised in Schakel's stock-check, Woolley, in the 2013 proceedings, outlines what we can know about the popularity of Swift's poems. The revelation is startling: to judge from statistics alone, several of Swift's poems that were favourites in the eighteenth century are not among our top picks today; and several of the poems now considered worthy of study were once not popular at all.

New Endings: The 1990s and Early 2000s

As the 250th anniversary of Swift's death [in 1995](#) loomed ~~in 1995~~, scholars began to consider more overtly the theme of aging and futurity in his works. A deft essay on Swift's complex self-presentation, **Connery 1993** outlines points of significance in the late poetry. A study of Swift's "temporal apprehension" throughout his writings, **Chalmers 1995** devotes a chapter to the poems – the Stella odes, *To Janus*, and *Verses*, among others. In 1998 appeared a notable collection of papers delivered in Dublin as a direct commemoration of the anniversary (**Douglas, Kelly and Ross 1998**). Poetry is sprinkled relatively lightly throughout the collection, though the editors' detailed overview of Swift studies at the time remains indispensable. One notable inclusion is Blackwell's piece on Swift's rivalry with Smedley. Blackwell grounds the dispute between the Dublin deans in what he calls an aggressive "outhouse ethos", a mutually self-destructive textual contamination that seeped in and out of their respective publications. That same year, appeared a festschrift for an influential Swift scholar, Hermann J. Real (**Freiburg et al 1998**). Poetry features prominently. Andrew Carpenter delivers an essay on "peculiar pastorals" by Swift and his younger Irish contemporaries Patrick Delany and Lord Orrery. Fischer and Ross discuss, in separate essays, one of the key Market Hill poems, *The Grand Question Debated*. Löffler also examines the Market Hill poems and other late works in terms of

music. Hammond considers the similarities and differences between Swift and Pope as satirists – although fecund, such an area had been surprisingly unexplored up until this point. Ross makes a case for reconsidering Swift and Robert Burns as arrangers of their own poetry editions. Woolley looks at a little known poem, *Wicked Treasonable Libel*.

Schakel 1992 is a teaching handbook on Swift's canon as a whole. Four contributors look in detail at poems. England urges educators to use the pithy aphorisms in *Verses*, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, *City Shower*, and other pieces, as an appropriate initiation for students new to Swift. Fricke outlines two areas of concern that have helped her teaching of *Verses*: Swift's use of the informal satiric mode and the emphasis on the role of the reader. Brown suggests a classroom study of Swift's Horatian poems would reveal the importance of imitation in the period. Frontain places *Dressing Room* alongside the works of Pope and Donne in a lesson plan designed to emphasise Swift's identity as a Christian satirist. In another teaching handbook on eighteenth-century poetry more broadly, **Fox 1990**, Pollak invites students to debate whether the scatological poems of the 1730s are expressions of or satires on misogyny, using *Cassinus and Peter*, *Strephon and Chloe*, *A Beautiful Young Nymph*, and *Dressing Room* as examples.

Scholars of Swift's poetry in the 1970s and 1980s usually took a clear position – often this meant proving the poems were typical, brilliant Augustan works or that they were unique, inexplicable anti-Augustan fare. Scholars in the 1990s favoured consolidation, that is, building on prior research. This is not to suggest essential new work didn't appear, but rather that familiar topics gained a fresh focus. **Paulson (1993)** considers the theme of self-memorialisation in the most famous poem, *Verses*. **Fuchs (1997)** re-reads *Cadenus and Vanessa* under the influence of Ovid. **Parker (1998)** revisits another frequently discussed piece, *City Shower*. Trenchant debates threaded throughout the 1970s and 1980s – most notably the issue of textual misogyny – continued into the 1990s and 2000s. The fullest study remains **Barnett 2006**, an account of Swift's circle of women. **Backscheider (2004)** similarly recalibrates the prominence of women in Swift's circle by "inverting" the standard image of the Dean's attitude towards them. **Tucker (1992)**, more than a decade earlier, had emphasised the role of one member in particular: Mary Barber. Other scholars faced the topic of Swift and gender in a different way, attending to the fictional relationship between Swift's poetic persona and the representation of real and imagined women. **Mueller (1999)** traces the competing tropes of impotence and desire in the Lady Acheson verse. **Maresca (1995)** adopts a Bergerian position (men imagining women imaging

men) in his reading of *Cadenus and Vanessa*. Published two decades apart, **Rabb 1990** and **Baudot 2009** demonstrate the difficulties of studying *Dressing Room*. Who was the poem written for? What was Swift trying to achieve? It remains a beautifully ugly conundrum of a text. Ugliness in a different sense is explored in **Bogel 2001** and **Gee 2010**. In a high-concept reading, Bogel traces the persistence of the trope of contamination in Swift's late satirical poems. Gee, meanwhile, places the early description poems into a larger culture of literary waste. **Brown (2001)** revisits a handful of Swift poems in mapping the creeping modernity of eighteenth-century England. *City Shower*, she finds, is a typical Augustan fable of irrepressible procreativity. **Parker (1998)**, in a reading of *City Shower*, likewise fixes on the epistemological force of filth.

Three major essay collections appeared in these years: **Weinbrot et al 2001**, **Connery 2002**, and **Hudson and Santesso 2008**. The first has three essays on poetry, all of which bring new life into familiar areas: Conlon considers the tension between anonymity and authority across Swift's poetic canon; Schakel attends to the neglected Market Hill poems; and Woolley considers some lesser known pieces. The two essays on poetry in **Connery 2002** address well-worn topics in new ways: Karian on the authorial strategies of *Verses*, and Barnett on Swift among the women. A festschrift for Rawson, **Hudson and Santesso 2008** contains five essays of especial interest to students of Swift's poetry. Although Benedict only makes passing comments on the poems, her commentary on "stuff" in Swiftian satire is instructive. The remaining essays focus on Swift's late career. Womersley looks at the late love poems in terms of Swiftian "shapeshifting". McLaverty traces naming and shaming in works by Pope and Swift after 1726. Rogers writes deftly about the so-called poetry of exile produced in the decade after Swift's final visit to England in 1727. Erskine-Hill revisits *Verses*. Published in the first decade of the twenty-first century, **Kupersmith (2007)** places Swift's Horatian imitations in the larger tradition of English versions of Roman satire in the period, reaffirming not only the influence of the classics on Swift but also its limitation. Paired with this, **Rudd 2005** places Swift's reworking of one of Horace's *Epistles* (1.7) within the complicated history of English imitation. Swift studies at the turn of the century, in sum, productively consolidated important areas of research and struck some new ground.

21st-Century Swift: Today and Tomorrow

A greater interest in the material text has taken hold in recent years, thanks to James Woolley, James McLaverty, and other leading book historians. A prominent member of this school, Stephen Karian produced in 2001 a timely reappraisal of our collective knowledge of the material text of *Verses*, and a 2008 piece which convincingly reorders the chronology of Swift's early compositions. His ground-breaking 2010 monograph considers Swift astride the twinned contexts of print and manuscript culture in Britain and Ireland. Eschewing the broad-brush approach often taken in the 1970s and 1980s (Jaffe, Schakel and Fischer, among others), he attends to a few poems in extended case studies: *On Poetry*, *The Legion Club*, and *Verses*. **Griffin (2010)** also takes a bookish approach to Swift's writing – here an intertextual comparison of verse and letters by Swift and Pope. We should pay attention to their fundamental differences as much as to their shared literary sensibilities, Griffin argues. Although not as comprehensive as one would like (*Panegyrick on the Dean* and other late poems expressly written under the influence of the *Dunciad*, for one thing, are not sufficiently addressed), the pairings offered are nevertheless tantalising: *The Rape of the Lock* with *Dressing Room*; *The Rape of the Lock* with *Cadenus and Vanessa*; *Epistle to a Lady* with the *Stella* poems; the *Dunciad* with *On Poetry*, to name but a few.

Rawson 2010 is a collection that features at least two essays of interest to poetry scholars, and many more for Swift scholars at large. Deutsch, following Derrida, outlines the poetics of friendship within Swift's fictive worlds, while Rawson demonstrates a profound poetic kinship between Swift and Yeats. Two notable collections appeared in 2013 – the first, **Bullard and McLaverty 2013**; the second, **Juhas et al 2013**, a further festschrift for Real. The most pertinent essay in the first collection, for present purposes, comes from Karian, who looks at Swift as a manuscript poet for whom 1728, the year of the *Dunciad*, proved pivotal. Rogers, co-author (with Paul Baines) of a biography on Edmund Curll, discusses Curll's position in eighteenth-century miscellany culture. McLaverty addresses a longstanding question in Swift studies: what was the author's role in the production of authoritative Faulkner edition? Swift, concludes McLaverty, involved himself in a 'patchy, interfering way'. The second 2013 collection comprises many useful essays on the poetry, not least Juhas's reading of Swift's darkly inventive Daphne poems. Löffler outlines the art of cosmetics in Swift's writing.

Carpenter examines the circulation of Swift's *Works* in 1750s Dublin. Walsh offers a detailed overview of Real's contribution to Swift studies that will be of wider interest.

New directions have been taken, not least of all in placing Swift astride different disciplines. **Lynall (2011)** revisits, profitably, a larger topic in Swift studies: the ancients versus the moderns. By attending to the minutiae of language and imagery associated with Renaissance traditions of alchemy, Lynall adds nuance to Boyle's more philosophical discussion of poetry and science in his extensive account of the Cowleyan odes (2000). A timely reappraisal of Swift as an Irish writer more generally, **Hammond 2010** contains a wealth of observations on the poetry, not least of all Swift's seemingly slight engagement with Hiberno-English. Familiar poems have gained insightful new readers, such as Marshall. **Marshall (2012)** interrogates the exegetical consensus that has built up around the most famous poem in Swift's corpus, *Verses*. **Marshall (2013)** makes numerous passing references to an array of Swift poems, grounding them in a comprehensive account of satirical practice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. **Smith (2012)** revisits a longstanding interest in Swift's scatological verse, which Smith places at the end of an English tradition dating back to Chaucer. The 2010s have also seen a consolidation of scholarship produced in recent decades by veterans in the field. **Rawson 2014** and **2015** bring together previously published work by a leading Swift scholar. Divided into three parts (Ireland, Fiction, and Poetry), the first book affords ample space to Swift's verses. One of the most striking chapters – on Swift's ironic engagement with the “heroick strain” – remains as challenging and as compelling as it did when it first appeared in 1982. No better reading of *Cadenus and Vanessa* has appeared since Rawson's discussion of rage and raillery in 1998 – that essay is reprinted here. **Rawson 2015** is less obviously interested in the poetry, but nevertheless the quick treatments of *Verses*, *On Poetry*, and other major works demand attention. Part of the Cambridge Companion series, **Rawson 2011** places Swift alongside other leading Anglophone poets, from Chaucer to Larkin. In a volume devoted to Swift in the same series, Rogers contributes the essay on ‘Swift the Poet’ (**Rogers 2003**). Both essays, though brief, suggest numerous new lines of enquiry.

Future scholarship will of course be shaped by Karian and Woolley's forthcoming volumes in the Cambridge Edition, which will include some new poems (a lengthy Market Hill piece, ‘Skinnibonia’, edited by Woolley, has already appeared in print) and make an authoritative case for some deattributions. Older editions will remain valuable for different reasons. In his

1983 edition of the poems, Rogers makes a noteworthy observation that has still not received the attention it deserves: Swift was especially influenced by, and a deep reader of, Virgil, Ovid and Horace. Never a committed translator of Latin or Greek, or updater of English or French, poems – as his fragmentary imitations of Horace alone attest – Swift nevertheless obsessively alluded to *Metamorphoses*, *Hudibras* and *Paradise Lost* throughout his career, often in the most surprising of places. As for contemporary poetry, the clearest echoes come from Prior's *Alma*, Gay's *Trivia* and *Fables*, and the major works of Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* above all others. Far from being a derivative poet, Swift was an ingenious mimic. A more vigorous appraisal of Swift's absorptive poetics – within a larger culture of mimicry – is sorely needed.

This is not to suggest that Swift's poems can only thrive in a system of contrast. *Verses on the Death* is a salty self-elegy that is, in effect, an agitating career retrospect that, oddly enough, can sit all on its own. In his poems for Vanessa and Stella, Swift also seems to revel, creatively, in participating in an older tradition of amatory verse mingled with educative instruction. In short, his style is simultaneously innovative and old-fashioned, fresh and withered. Against the master craftsman of the age, Pope, or such lauded poets as Young or Gay, Swift has often been dismissed – or admired narrowly, depending on your point of view – as a comic writer, a spoof Ovid more than an Irish Horace. His Juvenalian satire has fared much better, and many critics have explicated the audacious joys of the so-called excremental poems, *Dressing Room*, *Death and Daphne*, and the like. These and a dozen or so more poems will remain the core of Swift's poetic canon, subject to revisionist readings in the years ahead. This time, though, they might be joined by dozens more – the Market Hill poems alone deserve much more attention. *The Day of Judgement*, an old favourite, might be due a new readership.

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